

MEETING MINUTES (FINAL)

HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Technical Advisory Committee

Wednesday, February 7, 2007, 1pm to 3pm

Arizona Game and Fish Department Meeting Room

Tucson, Arizona 85745-3612

MEETING SUMMARY

City of Tucson Technical Advisory Committee: Trevor Hare (Sky Island Alliance), Rich Glinski, Linwood Smith, Marit Alanen (USFWS), Dennis Abbate (AGFD), Ralph Marra (Tucson Water Department), and Guy McPherson (University of Arizona).

Attendees: Lori Anderson (Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection), Cathy Crawford (AZGFD), Jamie Galayda (Arizona State Land Department), Ann Phillips (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development), Geoff Soroka (SWCA); Dennis Rule (Tucson Water), Kevin Barnes (Westland Resources), and Michael Toney (Tucson resident).

1. Minutes from 1-17-07 meeting

The meeting minutes from 1-17-07 have been reviewed and were approved by the TAC at today's meeting after comments provided by the TAC have been incorporated. Specific comments were provided via email from several TAC members. In addition, general comments were made by TAC members asking if for future meeting minutes, the conclusion of discussions could be noted to show what decisions were reached following long discussion. It would also be useful to list action items, then report about these as follow-up at later meetings.

2. Updates on buffelgrass summit, burrowing owl subcommittee meeting, new LLNB data

Ann noted the Buffelgrass summit is coming up at the end of the week and mentioned that a list of attendees for this meeting has been assembled. She asked if any members of the TAC members did not receive an invitation who wanted to attend. TAC members asked if there was representation from Tucson Parks and Recreation, Pima County Department of Transportation, Pima County Flood Control and other City departments. Ann thought these groups were represented in the attendee list. Cathy asked if AGFD was represented, and Marit asked about USFWS participation. **Ann said she would check to see if they were represented and get back to Cathy and Marit.** The importance of the need to train the landscaping contractors was noted, and Ann said it would be included in discussions at the summit meeting.

The scheduled mowing of the buffelgrass infestation in Avra Valley has begun. A discussion ensued regarding when the green-up period occurs and when the best time to spray is. Saguaro National Park West has reported having success spraying in the spring green-up period. Trevor asked whether a strategy regarding buffelgrass management was to be implemented as a result of

the summit. Ann noted that the summit participants would refine a draft action plan, with the intent of working as a region to undertake buffelgrass eradication.

Ann said OCSD had requested that AGFD form a regional burrowing owl (BUOW) subcommittee. Cathy said AGFD would be meeting internally to discuss BUOW management issues first, then will determine what steps to take relative to forming a regional committee on BUOW. AGFD should consider what to do with owls that are in the path of development; and, if these are not to be relocated to the Avra Valley planning area, whether there is an alternative area for relocation or translocation. Rich met with Mike Ingraldi (AGFD) and discussed several issues, including BUOW. A handout was provided of Rich's thoughts on BUOW issues and their implications for the Avra Valley HCP. **Cathy said she would report back to the TAC after AGFD has a chance to meet internally regarding BUOW.**

Ann read verbatim a statement written by Leslie Liberti based on a meeting with USFWS staff summarizing the relevance of the LLNB to the City's Avra Valley HCP and the urban fringe around Tucson. That statement is reproduced below:

. . . Now to LLNB updates. Ann and I met with USFWS staff this morning for a follow-up discussion to get an update on new research results. As it turns out, a small telemetry study was conducted last fall by USFWS biologists. This study tracked the movements of LLNB as they moved between their maternity roosts and foraging habitat, and between different patches of foraging habitat within a single night. The data demonstrate that these bats did not fly over the City when moving between foraging areas and roosts, even when the shortest distance between stops would have taken them over the city-proper. USFWS feels that this indicates that some level of development acts as a barrier to these species during their foraging activities. Since the bats can tolerate areas with rural development, and often use hummingbird feeders in these areas (especially when natural foraging plants are stressed or limited by drought conditions), the rural/suburban interface around the city is likely to be a critical foraging resource during periods of drought.

These two factors led USFWS to the conclusion that development around the city fringe could pose a real threat to the continued persistence of this species. Avra Valley is currently an important corridor for wildlife movement. Although much of the city-owned land is degraded by past agricultural areas, the very openness (undeveloped state) of the properties means that wildlife is less inhibited in their use of these areas, even if they are simply crossing them as opposed to foraging on or occupying the property (e.g. breeding, wintering, etc.). Development of large-scale water projects in Avra Valley could pose a risk to this important corridor. The potential for the City's water projects to reduce the viability of Avra Valley as a movement corridor for LLNB between roosts and foraging sites (even though they would not forage on city properties) could result in take of the LLNB on the basis that it impairs this species' essential behavioral patterns (this is the textbook definition of 'harm'). So the conclusion that USFWS has come to, with the full support of the Regional USFWS Director, is that the impacts of potential city land-use decisions and activities in Avra Valley would result in take of the LLNB unless properly mitigated.

A discussion ensued regarding new data on telemetry of the lesser long-nosed bat (LLNB) that came to the attention of USFWS. COT and USFWS recently met to discuss LLNB, including this data. While foraging outside of the City, two LLNB were recently tracked by AGFD. They went out of their way to avoid the urban area when returning to roosting sites, even though the shortest route would put them directly over the City's urbanized area, suggesting that urban development may have been deflecting the bats. According to Dennis A., both individuals were captured east of I-10; one in the vicinity of Oracle Road and Hardy and the second in the area of Sabino Canyon Road and Cloud Road. Both individuals traveled through areas with lower density development north and east of the City proper and were tracked to their day roost in the Box Canyon Area of the Rincon Mountains. As a result of this information, USFWS determined that Avra Valley could potentially provide an important dispersal corridor for LLNB since it is not urbanized, and as a result, LLNB should be addressed in the Avra Valley HCP. Ralph noted during the discussion that the LLNB was previously acknowledged by the TAC when discussing the Southlands Sub-Area but it was purposefully excluded as a species of concern in the Avra Valley Sub-area. It has now become important in the Avra Valley Sub-area and possibly elsewhere.

A request was made that Scott Richardson or Mima Falk (both USFWS) be asked to attend the next TAC meeting to address the results of the study, the basis for the conclusion that Avra Valley could be a dispersal corridor, what relevance that has to the HCP, and what mitigation might look like. It would also be helpful to see a map showing the route the bats took. **OCSO will request this attendance.**

A question was asked about whether the telemetry report was available. Dennis A. noted that there may not be a report, as this was opportunistic telemetry data collected to track the path of bats that were visiting hummingbird feeders and only two bats were tracked. Ralph asked if these data provided the basis for USFWS to make a formal determination? Rich said that it was too preliminary for it to be the basis of a USFWS determination given the opportunistic nature of the effort. At Ralph's request, Ann re-read out loud Leslie's written statement about the LLNB and her re-reading appeared to confirm that the USFWS had in fact made a determination regarding "take." **Dennis A. will check into this and get back to the TAC** regarding any more information that is made available to him about this issue. He noted that bat deaths are being observed around hummingbird feeders. Cathy said the Town of Marana HCP group is dealing with this same issue and has already discussed this at their HCP meeting.

A meeting has been set up for Tuesday between AZGF, USFWS, Marana and bat experts regarding potential management strategies related to this issue. They were considering whether to engage the public in collecting data from feeder locations, and then to determine from that data if and how to conduct broader bat monitoring. **Cathy will report back to the TAC on the results of this meeting and provide information on the compilation of hummingbird feeder data relative to bats.** Other bat studies were mentioned including work by Sandy Wolfe. **OCSO will look into this and report back to the TAC.**

Dennis A. mentioned that there is a wealth of bat biologists in the region and suggested we might get guidance from them regarding how to address bats in the City HCP. He suggested preparing a set of questions for bat experts similar to what was done for BUOW. Some of the potential questions that were discussed are: What role do hummingbird feeders have when managing for LLNB? What is the significance of the USFWS opinion regarding this new information? What role does "take" play in all of this? The implications of this LLNB information are huge as ~150,000 to 180,000 people are expected by 2030 as was noted at a stakeholders meeting in early February with regard to Pima County's Southwest Infrastructure Plan; this area included the Ryan

Airfield area (near Three Points). Ralph said that this new 2030 range estimate was three to four times greater than previously projected by PAG for this area and could have implications for expanded transportation corridors in Avra Valley. Ralph asked whether the bats that were tracked actually dispersed through the Avra Valley HCP planning area. **Saying he was not sure, Dennis A. said he would look into and get back to the TAC.** Dennis A. noted that foraging occurring in our area is of concern and he felt development would impact the bat. There was discussion about the urban fringe around Tucson. Cathy said that this could be an issue for Tucson. Cathy noted Marana has foraging habitat for the bat. Ralph asked if any of the reported telemetry data had been collected in Avra Valley. Dennis A. said it had not, but there was anecdotal information about bats in Tucson Mountain feeders. Geoff noted they had been seen in the Ironwood Monument. Geoff also noted that the two LLNBs observed in Ironwood Monument were more likely from the north and not from the south through the Avra Valley Sub-area. The question came up of whether AGFD could do more studies on the bat. **Dennis A. said he would check into the costs for doing more telemetry.**

3. Avra Valley HCP

a. Revisions to Chapter 5, Conservation Program

Ann handed out the Avra Valley species maps and noted that COT needs feedback from the TAC regarding Chapters 5 and 6. Trevor mentioned that he still wants to have some leading HCP experts review the mitigation ratios that have been proposed by Leslie. Lori mentioned that these chapters should also be reviewed by the RPAC. Dennis A. referred to a handful of questions that he had with the wording of Chapter 5. **TAC agreed upon 2/21/07 as the deadline for them to submit comments.** Comments can be handwritten or can be electronic changes made to the files for these chapters that were previously sent to the TAC.

b. Revision to Chapter 6, Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Ann asked for any comments regarding Chapter 6, and there were none brought up by the TAC. **TAC members agreed to provide comments by 2/21/07 on this chapter.**

c. The Avra Valley Species maps

Ann then walked the group through the revised Avra Valley species maps that were distributed, explaining changes made since these were last discussed. She explained that the revised maps reflect: 1) removal of existing 404 mitigation areas that cannot be used as Conservation Priority Areas (CPAs) within the Avra Valley HCP, and 2) removal of all of SAVSARP since it has not been decided whether this will be covered by a separate Section 7 consultation or the HCP.

Conservation easements on CAVSARP will be noted on a future version of the maps. A discussion followed regarding whether the conservation easements put into place during the Section 7 consultation for CFPO (while it was listed by USFWS) at CAVSARP were still protected. Tucson Water noted that they intended to maintain the conserved areas either way. The language of the Conservation Easements (CE) would be a factor in whether the CE lands were legally still required to be held as easements. **Marit will check with USFWS about whether the delisting affects CE areas for CFPO.**

Ann went through each species map and discussed changes that have been made since the last TAC discussion. Not much has changed with the Tucson shovel-nosed snake, ground snake and

pale Townsend's big-eared bat. Potential habitat mapped for the yellow-billed cuckoo was adjusted to add areas of riparian canopy/mesquite bosque. BUOW habitat was adjusted to match the Grandmaison report for suitable habitat. CFPO habitat was adjusted per input from Scott Richardson. Tucson Water asked about the significance of the "yellow" corridor lines displayed on each species map. It was clarified that these corridors are in place for the CFPO specifically, but also provide potential movement corridors for other target species. Dennis R. requested that the corridor lines be removed for those species they are not relevant for. **OCSO will incorporate this comment on next set of maps.**

Trevor requested that a discussion of the corridor be added to the HCP to address the wider connectivity issues associated with it, such as for large mammals, and to note that it is based on landforms and other criteria for its placement. He also wondered if stakeholder comments should be kept separate from biologically-based comments so there was a biologically-based version of the HCP.

The TAC requested that when Chapter 5 is revised based on comments from the TAC, there be subsequent discussion scheduled at a TAC meeting.

OCSO will provide revised conservation calculation tables to the TAC when they are completed.

4. Topics at upcoming meetings

Ann mentioned that the discussion will be moving away from Avra Valley and towards the Southlands HCP at upcoming TAC meetings.

5. Call to audience

Mike expressed concern regarding the buffelgrass situation in the Tucson area and current management decisions regarding the eradication of the species. He felt that the management decision to use Roundup would incur large costs and have other negative effects. He feels that management should move in a different direction. He is concerned with the amount of Roundup that would need to be used to effectively do this and wondered what effects this would have on the flora and fauna of the area, and referenced the recent buffelgrass eradication effort on A-Mountain. Ann pointed out that the reason for spraying on "A" Mountain was related to archaeological concerns with the area so pulling was not an option due to ground disturbance it causes.

6. Adjournment